

Sunshine in Government Initiative

1101 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 1100 · Arlington, Virginia 22209
Phone (703) 807-2100 · Fax (703) 807-2109
www.SunshineInGovernment.org · info@SunshineInGovernment.org



PRESS RELEASE
Contact: Rick Blum

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
rblum@sunshineingovernment.org
202-309-2654 (cell)

U.S. House Sends FOIA Reforms to President's Desk, Media Groups Praise Changes Helping Public Obtain Documents

The ten media organizations comprising the Sunshine in Government Initiative (SGI) applaud the House and Senate for passing important bipartisan reforms to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX), House Oversight and Government Reform Chairman Henry Waxman (D-CA), Rep. Tom Davis (R-VA), Rep. William Lacy Clay (D-MO), Rep. Todd Platts (R-PA) led the effort to pass this legislation. Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ) also played a key role in getting this legislation over the finish line.

The media group members of SGI appreciate the hard work and dedication of these members and their staffs for their diligent work to improve the way FOIA works for the American public. Members of the SGI coalition include: **American Society of Newspaper Editors, Associated Press, Association of Alternative Newsweeklies, Coalition of Journalists for Open Government, National Association of Broadcasters, National Newspaper Association, Newspaper Association of America, Radio-Television News Directors Association, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and Society of Professional Journalists.**

Statements from the Sunshine in Government Initiative and SGI Members Organizations

"After years of growing government secrecy, today's vote reaffirms the public's fundamental right to know," said Rick Blum, Coordinator of the **Sunshine in Government Initiative**. "Fixing FOIA isn't a secret. This bill makes commonsense changes to help the public know what government is up to. We thank the sponsors who championed real changes and worked hard to keep the government's doors open."

"We applaud Congress for resolving the differences that existed in the House and Senate versions of this important legislation and making its passage a reality," said Gilbert Bailon, president of the **American Society of Newspaper Editors** and editorial page editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. "This action reaffirms the public's right to know and buttresses a statutory right vital to our Democracy."

Long-time open government advocate Pete Weitzel, Coordinator of the **Coalition of Journalists for Open Government**, which is a member of SGI, called the vote "a true holiday gift from Congress."

Community newspapers particularly sought an independent office to resolve disputes. "Strengthening the Freedom of Information Act will pay dividends in public information for a long time to come. This new law has many virtues. But as community newspaper journalists, we particularly celebrate the development of an ombudsman office under the Office of Government Information Services," said Steve Haynes, President of the **National Newspaper Association** and Publisher of the Oberlin (KS) News.

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"We hope it will open doors that have too long been locked by delay and inattention to information requests. National Newspaper Association congratulates Senators Leahy, Cornyn and Kyl and House Chairman Henry Waxman for their authorship and contributions to this bill. We hope this will be the first of many enactments to improve transparency and help citizens better understand how the government operates."

Other media leaders praised today's vote and the bill's sponsors. "The Freedom of Information Act is an indispensable tool for citizens and businesses to access information about their government, which, unfortunately, too often includes government waste and wrongdoing," said John F. Sturm, President and CEO of the **Newspaper Association of America**. "Today's bipartisan passage of the OPEN Government Act to strengthen and reform FOIA is a great day for the public's interest in good government. We applaud the dedication of all the lawmakers who pushed this important measure forward, particularly Senators Patrick Leahy, John Cornyn, Jon Kyl and Reps. Henry Waxman and Todd Platts."

"This is a huge advancement for open government, thanks to the leadership of Senators Leahy, Cornyn and Kyl and Representatives Waxman and Platt," said Barbara Cochran, president of the **Radio-Television News Directors Association**. "But this isn't just a victory for journalists; it's a victory for every single member of the American public. This legislation will eliminate some of the lengthy delays and persistent backlogs in the FOIA process that create obstacles and limit the public's ability to make informed choices in their communities."

Other SGI members saw this as a strong change in direction. "Passage of the FOIA bill will allow not only members of the press but all Americans to hold their government more accountable. In a time when First Amendment rights are under attack almost daily in this country, this bill is a major step to ensuring America has a free press and a government that is transparent and open," noted Clint Brewer, president of the **Society of Professional Journalists** and Executive Editor of the City Paper in Nashville, Tennessee.

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